

it is said they remain there during the whole year, and that they breed in the marshes. During the day they rest in flocks on the grassy plains, at some distance from the water. Being at anchor in a small vessel, in one of the deep creeks between the islands in the Parana, as the evening drew to a close, one of these scissor-beaks suddenly appeared. The water was quite still, and many little fish were rising. The bird continued for a long time to skim the surface; flying in its wild and irregular manner up and down the narrow canal, now dark with the growing night and the shadows of the overhanging trees. At Monte Video, I observed that large flocks remained during the day on the mud banks, at the head of the harbour; in the same manner as those which I observed on the grassy plains near the Parana. Every evening they took flight in a straight line seaward. From these facts, I suspect, that the Rhynchops frequently fishes by night, at which time, many of the lower animals come more abundantly to the surface than during the day. I was led by these facts to speculate on the possibility of the bill of the Rhynchops, which is so pliable, being a delicate organ of touch. But Mr. Owen, who was kind enough to examine the head of one, which I brought home in spirits, writes to me, (August 7, 1837,) that—

“The result of the dissection of the head of the *Rhynchops*, comparatively with that of the head of the duck, is not what you anticipated. The facial, or sensitive branches of the fifth pair of nerves, are very small; the third division in particular, is filamentary, and I have not been able to trace it beyond the soft integument at the angles of the mouth. After removing with care, the thin horny covering of the beak, I cannot perceive any trace of those nervous expansions which are so remarkable in the lamelli-rostral aquatic birds; and which in them supply the tooth-like process, and soft marginal covering of the mandibles. Nevertheless, when we remember how sensitive a hair is, through the nerve situated at its base, though without any in its substance, it would not be safe to deny altogether, a sensitive faculty in the beak of the Rhynchops.”

M. Lesson (Manuel d'Ornithologie, vol. ii. p. 335.) has stated, that he has seen these birds opening the shells of the Mactræ, buried in the sandbanks on the coast of Chile. From their weak bills, with the lower mandible so much produced, their short legs and long wings, it seems very improbable that this can be a general habit, although it may sometimes be resorted to. Wilson, who was well acquainted with this bird, does not believe “the report of its frequenting oyster beds, and feeding on these fish.” The existence, however, of this same report in the United States, makes the question, whether the Rhynchops does not sometimes turn the peculiar structure of its beak to this purpose, worthy of further investigation.

*VIRALVA ARANEA.* *G. R. Gray.*

*Sterna aranea*, *Wils.* Am. Orn. pl. 72. f. 6.

My specimen was procured at Bahia Blanca, in Northern Patagonia. I may here observe, that many navigators have supposed that terns, when met with out at sea, are a sure indication of land. But these birds seem not unfrequently to be lost in the open ocean; thus one (*Megalopterus stolidus*) flew on board the Beagle in the Pacific, when several hundred miles from the Galapagos Archipelago. No doubt, the remark made by navigators, with respect to the proximity of land where terns are seen, refers to birds in a flock, fishing, or otherwise showing that they are familiar with that part of the sea. I, therefore, more particularly mention, that off the mouth of the Rio Negro, on the Patagonian shore, I saw a flock (probably the *Viralva aranea*) fishing seventy miles from land: and off the coast of Brazil a flock of another species, 120 from the nearest part of the coast. The latter birds were in numbers, and were busily engaged in dashing at their prey.

*MEGALOPTERUS STOLIDUS.* *Boië.*

*Sterna stolidus*, *Linn.* Syst. i. 227.

My specimens were procured from the Galapagos Archipelago. It is well known to be an inhabitant of the seas in the warmer latitudes over the whole world. The Rocks of St. Paul's, nearly under the equator, in the Atlantic ocean, were almost covered with the rude and simple nests of this bird, made with a few pieces of sea-weed. The females were sitting upon their eggs (in February), and by the side of many of their nests, parts of flying-fish were placed, I suppose, by the male bird for his partner to feed on during the labour of incubation.

*PHALACROCORAX CARUNCULATUS.* *Stephens.*

*Phalacrocorax carunculatus*, *Steph.* Gen. Zool.

*Pelecanus carunculatus*, *Gm.* Syst. i. 576.

*Phalacrocorax imperialis*, *King*, Zool. Proc. vol. i. pt. 1. 30.

I procured a specimen of this bird at Port St. Julian, on the coast of Patagonia, where, during January, many were building. I merely mention it here, for the purpose of describing the singularly bright colours of the naked skin about its head. Skin round the eyes “campanula blue;” cockles at the base of the upper mandible, “saffron mixed with gamboge-yellow.” Marks between the eye and the corner of the mouth, “orpiment orange;” tarsi scarlet.